



## Building United, Resilient Movements to End the Climate Emergency

We who have been involved in social movements have been and continue to be a powerful force in fighting for justice around the world. We have organized movements to challenge many forms of oppression—classism, sexism, racism, homophobia, and so on and their manifestations in war, destruction of land, dehumanization of people, and genocide. We have come together to build relationships, communities, organizations, and alliances in order to build a just society that allows the Earth and every living being to thrive.

### Our Movements Bend the Arc Towards Justice

Our movements have changed the course of human history and improved conditions for humanity and the world we live in. We have worked together to transform societies. We can draw inspiration from many movements, including the following:

- Beginning in the early 1900s the women of Bangladesh fought for freedom from colonial domination while at the same time improving the status of women.
- In 1973 the people of Guinea-Bissau united five Indigenous tribes to win self-governance and end a legacy of slavery and colonial rule.
- In the 1970s the Indigenous people of the Cordillera stopped the Chico Dam from being built, during martial law in the Philippines.
- In the 1990s the Indigenous Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico waged a struggle for land, livelihood, self-determination, and democracy.
- The Brazilian landless workers' movement, *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra* (MST), is reclaiming land, protecting traditions, preserving seeds for organic farming, and fighting for good livelihood.

In the United States, past struggles—for civil rights; tribal rights; liberation for African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, women, workers, and LGBTQ+ people; and for international solidarity, nuclear disarmament, and ending the war in Vietnam—have paved the way for more recent movements—Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock, Me Too, Occupy Wall Street, No Ban No Wall, and Sunrise.



When we move together as a united front, we are a powerful force. We can take on the biggest challenges of our time—ending the climate emergency and creating a just and sustainable world. We can ensure that the Earth and its inhabitants thrive well both now and into the future.

### Oppression Derails Our Movements

As mighty as our collective power has been, we have also experienced defeat. We have had to contend with systemic oppression. Oppression has often undermined our unity and sapped our

strength. Enormous amounts of money are spent to keep the oppressive system in place through exploitative policies and practices.

Many of our difficulties are rooted in oppression—systemic, interpersonal, and internalized. *Systemic oppression* is how societal institutions allow some groups of people to dominate other groups of people and to dominate the Earth and all living beings. *Interpersonal oppression* is how systemic oppression shows up in our relationships and makes us turn against each other instead of



*Sustaining All Life* (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end the climate emergency within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism* (UER) consists of a wide diversity of people in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from emotional harm resulting from oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging the release of painful emotions, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved. Re-evaluation Counseling currently exists in 95 countries.



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fighting together to change the oppressive system. *Internalized oppression* is how systemic oppression shows up in ourselves, impacting our hearts and minds; we embody hurtful messages, feel discouraged and powerless, and fail to fight for our own interests.

Oppression, in its many forms, exists in our movements, organizations, relationships, and ourselves. There is no movement that has not been negatively impacted, sidetracked, or lost momentum because of unresolved conflicts caused by oppression. Past efforts at transforming societies have often been unable to shake off the effects of the old oppressive institutions. Even when oppressive institutions have been changed, the oppression and exploitation of the old society reappear in new forms. The limitations of our movements are a reflection of our failure to undo the impact of living in oppressive societies.

We know from history that we will face great external obstacles, including misinformation and state violence, as we try to change entrenched power structures. We need everyone if we are to build a united, resilient movement—and to have everyone, we need to recover from the grips of oppression. We can find the places where we agree and then keep moving through all obstacles that threaten our unity. In doing so, it is important to have an agreed-upon theory, a set of tools, a practice, and communities. This will allow us to work through these obstacles to reach for each other and to heal from oppression.

### **Groups Moving Through Oppression**

Have you, or someone you know, left a relationship, organization, or movement due to “irreconcilable differences?” Sometimes these differences are ideological. Most often,

interpersonal oppression is involved. At times, this interpersonal oppression is misidentified as ideological difference. Sometimes the conflict is rooted in oppressive structures, policies, and practices that operate in our relationships, organizations, and movements (and often in the same groups where we hope to dismantle oppression!). It can seem that the best response is to walk away.

What if we could get support to identify and address the root causes of our interpersonal struggles? What if we could remember that ending each form of oppression is good for all people? We have a theory and practice that makes this possible.

### **Healing Work is Social Justice Work**

We are experiencing a climate emergency. Humanity is heading toward extinction—many living things have already gone extinct. To reverse this, we must unite. We have to work together in new ways and that means understanding oppression, how we have been hurt by it, and healing from it. This means we must engage in emotional work as well as change institutions. The good news is that there are effective easily-learned tools for doing this work.

To build sustainable, resilient movements to end the climate emergency, we must decide to heal from all forms of oppression. We must seek unity, knowing that long-term unity requires a continual process of reflection, processing, healing, and transformation. We must decide that healing work is social justice work. This is the work of *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism*.







## The Work of *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism*

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—if we make some very large changes in our economy and the lives we live in the next decade. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis can be resolved only if we by simultaneously address racism, genocide of Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on the groups targeted by these oppressions, and on other vulnerable populations (including populations of people who are elderly, disabled, and very young). Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and racism.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people, (2) widespread feelings that it's too late and any actions will be ineffective, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the climate emergency, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of our economic system. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these and other issues.

### **The role of oppression**

The economic and political forms of our societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the earth. This results in exploitation and oppression. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we tend to act toward others in ways that repeat the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the mental and emotional harm we experience is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though people are vulnerable to acting in oppressive

ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a person has been hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

### **The importance of healing personal harm**

The mental and emotional harm done to us by oppression and other hurtful experiences interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the climate emergency.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other harmful behavior is neither quick nor easy work. Many of us resist this personal healing work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the harm done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this harm.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts and address barriers to effective organizing. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. By releasing emotional pain in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.



Sustaining All Life



**For more information, see:**

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